

Message Text

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EO 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: RTG REFUGEE DETENTION CENTER AT NAKHON PHANOM

REF: BANGKOK 975 (NOTAL)

1. HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF NAKHON PHANOM PROVINCE IS ONE OF THE THREE SITES FOR DETENTION CENTERS THAT THE RTG PLANNED FOR ACCOMMODATING POST-NOVEMBER 15 REFUGEE ARRIVALS. (REFTEL DISCUSSES ANOTHER ONE IN NORTH THAILAND.) A VISIT TO NAKHON PHANOM CENTER FEBRUARY 21 REVEALED A COMPLETED FACILITY, SO FAR UNINHABITED BY REFUGEES, ON 60 RAI OF LAND. AN ADDITIONAL 153 RAI HAVE BEEN SET ASIDE FOR FARMING. (AN ACRE CONTAINS 2.5 RAI.)

2. A FENCE ENCIRCLES THE 60 RAI, WHICH CONTAIN, BESIDE A GREAT DEAL OF OPEN SPACE, AN ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS, A COUPLE SMALL BUILDINGS TO BE USED AS DISPENSARIES, A HOUSE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL, A MEETING HALL, TWO LARGE SINGLE BUILDINGS DESIGNED TO HOLD 600 REFUGEES AT THE LEVEL OF 300 REFUGEES PER BUILDING (EACH BUILDING HAVING 30 CUBICLES WITH TEN REFUGEES PER CUBICLE), LATRINES, AN ARTESIAN WELL, A WATER TOWER, THREE GUARD TOWERS, AND TWO GUARD POSTS. MOST OF THE BUILDINGS ARE OF

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WOOD WITH CEMENT BASES. THE COST OF CONSTRUCTION WAS 1,258,000 BAHT (US\$62,900).

3. THE CENTER IS LOCATED 20 KILOMETERS WEST OF NAKHON PHANOM CITY, JUST NORTH OF THE HIGHWAY TO SAKHON NAKHON. IT IS SIX KILOMETERS WEST OF NAKHON PHANOM AIR BASE, AND THREE KILOMETERS EAST OF A ROYAL THAI ARMY BATTALION CAMP. THERE IS A RESERVOIR

JUST OUTSIDE THE CAMP. THE RTG PLANS TO STATION ABOUT 30 PEOPLE AT THE CAMP. THEY WILL INCLUDE AN ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, POLICEMEN, AND SOME VOLUNTEER DEFENSE CORPS SOLDIERS.

4. THE DISTRICT OFFICER SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THE CENTER HAD BEEN READY FOR OCCUPANCY SINCE DECEMBER 30, THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR (MOI) HAD NOT YET GOTTEN AROUND TO PAY THE CONTRACTOR FOR THE CONSTRUCTION NOR TO FINANCE OPERATION OF THE CENTER. HE EXPECTED THE FIRST REFUGEES TO ARRIVE WITHIN TWO WEEKS. WE POINTED OUT THAT, AS OF FEBRUARY 14, THERE WERE 1,209 REFUGEES IN THE NIGKHAI DETENTION CENTER ALONE. HE WAS ALSO AWARE THAT THERE WERE 39 MORE IN THE NAKHON PHANOM INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY CENTER. THERE WAS NO WAY OF ESTIMATING THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES SCATTERED IN DISTRICT JAILS ALONG THE THAI BORDER WITH LAOS. THE DISTRICT OFFICER SAID THAT FURTHER WORK, SUCH AS DOUBLE TIERING THE CUBICLES TO ACCOMMODATE MORE REFUGEES, WOULD HAVE TO AWAIT PAYMENT TO THE CONTRACTOR FOR THE INITIAL JOB. THOSE REFUGEES WITH THEIR OWN FUNDS COULD BUILD MODEST BAMBOO HUTS ON THE PREMISES. THERE WAS ROOM ENOUGH TO ACCOMMODATE THE HUTS.

5. COMMENT: THE PROVISION OF LAND FOR FARMING IS A PARTICULARLY GOOD IDEA, BUT THE BUILDINGS OF THE CENTER ARE FATED TO BE OVERCROWDED. THE RTG APPEARS TO HAVE
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THOUGHT OF ONE MODEST WAY TO REDUCE THE CURRENT RUSH OF ELIGIBLES FOR THE CENTER. LESLIE A GOODYEAR, UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR WESTERN SOUTH ASIA, MET FEBRUARY 21 WITH DAMRONG SUNTHONSARATHUN, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF MOI'S DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION. DAMRONG ASKED GOODYEAR WHETHER THE UNHCR WOULD BE WILLING TO ADMIT TO ITS CAMPS AND FURNISH SUPPORT FOR THOSE POST-NOVEMBER 15 ARRIVALS WHO HAD RELATIVES ALREADY IN THE CAMPS. DAMRONG SAID THAT HE REALIZED THAT SUCH ADMISSION WOULD BE CONTRARY TO RTG POLICY AND TO THE JULY 22, 1977 AGREEMENT WITH THE UNHCR. GOODYEAR SAID THAT HE WOULD BE GLAD TO ACCOMMODATE THEM IN THE CAMPS, AND WOULD FURNISH DAMRONG A WRITTEN COMMITMENT TO DO SO.

WHITEHOUSE

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